

METHOD OF CLUSTERING IMAGES OF A VIDEO SEQUENCE

The invention relates to a method and a device for clustering key images by using spatial-temporal attributes.

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Clustering is aimed at grouping data by utilizing measurements of distances or similarities between them, data that are not very distant being clustered within one and the same class. An application pertaining to digital video data relates to the automatic construction of video summaries.

Figure 1 represents a general scheme of a method of constructing a video summary of an image sequence.

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In a first step 1, the video sequence is chopped into video shots. A second step 2 extracts characteristic images or key images from the various shots of the sequence. For each key image, this is step 3, a signature is calculated, for example on the basis of attributes of the image such as colour, structure, etc. The next step 4 is aimed at clustering the various shots which resemble one another into clusters of shots. A measurement of similarity is thus performed, on the basis of any calculation of distances between the signatures of the key images associated with each shot. The next step 5 constructs the summary by extracting a key image per cluster of shots.

This method makes it possible to reduce the number of characteristic shots, for example during video sequences with alternating shots, so as to create video summaries, indices, etc.

A known approach tackling the problems of clustering of shots for the construction of video summaries is that proposed by Yeung and Yeo in the document "Segmentation of video by clustering and graph analysis", Computer Vision and Image Understanding, vol 71, no 1, July, pp

94-109, 1998. With each pair of shots is associated a distance which is a measure regarding the differences between signatures. In addition to the distance between signatures, the procedure proposed contrives not to
5 gather together shots whose temporal distance is greater than a temporal threshold T . The underlying idea rests upon the assumption that shots belonging to one and the same semantic unit cannot be very distant. This assumption also has the advantage of limiting the
10 number of potential clusterings and thus of limiting the calculation cost. The clustering algorithm used operates on successive clusterings of shots commencing with the most similar until the distances are all greater than a threshold.

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In this procedure, if two shots are separated by more than T images, the clustering is not possible. In the article cited, T is fixed at a value of the order of a few thousand images. The main problem of this procedure
20 resides in the fact that this threshold is fixed, that it is of significant importance to the final result and that it is therefore difficult to fix a priori. For example, if a dialogue scene lasts more than 3000 images and if this value exceeds the temporal
25 threshold, overchopping occurs. All the shots thus clustered must be pairwise close both visually and temporally. The size of the clusters thus generated is therefore relatively limited. The final result of this clustering algorithm is characterized by the obtaining
30 of clusters that are relatively uniform in terms of number of shots, this number generally being small and in any event limited by the value of the threshold T .

The invention is aimed at alleviating the aforesaid
35 drawbacks. Its subject is a method of clustering images of a video sequence consisting of shots and represented by a graph-like structure, a node of the graph representing a shot or a class of shots defined by key images and the nodes being connected by edges,

characterized in that it comprises the following iteration:

- selection of an edge a_k connecting nodes n_i and n_j
- 5 - calculation of the potential of node n_m)
merging of the two nodes n_i and n_j , as a
function of the distances between the
attributes of the key images defining the class
of shots of node n_i and those of the key images
10 defining the class of shots of node n_j and as a
function of the temporal distance of these key
images,
- calculation of the potential of each edge
connecting the merged node n_m to another node
15 of the graph previously connected to nodes n_i
or n_j , as a function of the distances between
the attributes of the key images defining the
class of shots of the merged node and those of
the key images defining the class of shots of
20 the other node and as a function of the
temporal distance between these key images, the
new class of shots associated with the merged
node comprising the key images of the classes
of shots of the merged nodes,
25 - merging of the two nodes and validation of the
new graph if the energy of this graph, which is
the sum of the potentials of the nodes and of
the edges, is less than the energy of the graph
before merging.

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According to a particular implementation of the invention, the graph is initialized by assigning a node to each shot and by creating edges from one node to another node if the shots relating to these nodes are
35 separated by a predetermined maximum number T of shots.

According to a particular implementation of the invention, the value of potential associated with the

edges and with the nodes is a respectively decreasing and increasing function of temporal distance.

5 The calculation of similarity of the images takes into account the distance between signatures, for example the difference between histograms, and the temporal distance between key images defining the shots. This temporal constraint is adaptive, two shots that are initially too far apart to be clustered possibly then
10 becoming potentially "clusterable" should intermediate shots be merged.

The calculation algorithm is based on energy minimization by merging relying on a graph structure.
15 Contrary to the previous procedure, in order to belong to a cluster of images, also subsequently referred to as a class of images or class of shots, a candidate image must be visually and temporally close to at least one image of the cluster.

20 An advantage of the invention is the taking into account of images even if they are temporally far apart, due to merging, while favouring the clustering of temporally close images.

25 Another advantage resides in the fact that only one image of a cluster has to be similar to the candidate image in order to permit the merge. The clusters thus created can comprise more elements than in the case of
30 the conventional procedure. The scheme proposed makes it possible to generate more heterogeneous clusters, that are less dependent on values of thresholds and hence closer to the data, without thereby rendering the calculations too complex or too lengthy.

35 Other features and advantages of the invention will become clearly apparent in the following description given by way of nonlimiting example and offered in conjunction with the appended figures which represent:

- figure 1, a general scheme of the construction of video summaries,
- figure 2a, an exemplary initial graph,
- figure 2b, the result of this graph after an iteration,
- figure 3, a flow chart for minimizing the energy of the graph.

The procedure proposed relies on a graph structure. A graph consists of a set of nodes and edges. A node n_i symbolizes a shot or cluster of video shots that are similar according to the visual and temporal distance chosen, each shot P_i being represented by at least one key image. The edges connect the nodes together, two nodes that are not connected by an edge not being potentially mergeable.

A size of temporal window T is chosen. It is given as a maximum number of shots T separating two shots in the video sequence. Upon the initialization of the graph, edges are created on the basis of a given node corresponding to a given shot towards each of the nodes whose shots lie in the temporal window of this given shot.

In a practical manner, the nodes are first connected by edges according to the sequential unfurling of the video sequence. This progression is subsequently taken into account, when adding the complementary edges, for the application of the temporal window. Then, the integer value T chosen for this step of initializing the graph signifies that only the nodes separated at most by T nodes from the node considered are taken into account for the calculation of the initial edges starting from this node. An initial edge a_{ij} is created between node n_i and node n_j only if the temporal distance d_T separating these nodes with which the shots P_i and P_j are associated is less than a threshold T . This constraint is effective only on initialization of

the graph, the later mergings of nodes making it possible to connect nodes that are much further away from the origin, if necessary.

- 5 The choice of this threshold on initialization is made with the aim of optimizing the calculation time that is highly dependent on the number of edges.

10 The initialization of the graph is performed by creating a node per video shot. Figure 2a represents an initial graph consisting of a set of 6 video shots symbolized by the nodes 1 to 6. In the example of figure 2a, by way of simplified illustration, the temporal threshold or temporal window on initialization
15 is fixed at $T=1$. The threshold is in reality chosen equal to 6 in our implementation. In the example therefore, the edges are created between a node and the nodes separated from this node by one shot at most. Figure 2b, which corresponds to the merging of nodes 2
20 and 4 to give node 7 shows however that, right from the first iteration, nodes 6 and 7, connected by edges, are outside the temporal window.

25 The energy of the system is equal to the sum of the potentials of the edges and of the nodes. The aim is to cluster or merge the nodes in such a way as to reduce the overall energy of the system.

30 To define the overall energy of the system, the concept of potential V_n of a node and V_a of an edge is introduced. A potential is calculated with the help of a base distance between two images I_i and I_j , temporal distance and distance between attributes.

35 The value of the potential associated with an edge a_{ij} is defined with the aid of a decreasing function of distance. The bigger the temporal distances and the distances between attributes, the smaller the potential. The overall objective of the algorithm being

to minimize the overall energy of the system, the closer according to the distances defined above are the shots tied to two nodes, the higher will be the potentials of the edges and the more favoured will be the merging and hence the elimination of the edges.

The value of the potential associated with node n_k is defined with the help of an increasing function of distance. The smaller the temporal distances or the distances between attributes as calculated between the images belonging to two distinct nodes, the smaller the potential associated with the merge node, hence the more the system will be inclined to merge the two nodes to create a node of small potential.

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Let $V_a(n_i, n_j)$ and $V_n(n_m)$ be respectively the potentials of an edge connecting nodes n_i and n_j and of a node n_m .

Firstly we describe the potential related to the edges. Here we calculate the "inter-image" potentials of the edge for each of the pairs formed of an image from among the images associated with an end node of the edge and an image from among the images associated with another end node of the edge. Stated otherwise, we are dealing with potentials calculated on the basis of the cross distances between the images associated with the first node and those associated with the second node at the ends of the edge.

The potential $V_a(n_i, n_j)$ of an edge may therefore be written as a function of the cross distances between the images I_k belonging to n_i and the images I_l belonging to n_j . The following minimum value is calculated:

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$$V_a(n_i, n_j) = \min_{I_k \in P_i, I_l \in P_j} (w_{att} \cdot F_a(K_{att}, \tilde{d}_{att}, d_{att}(I_k, I_l)) + w_T \cdot F_a(K_T, \tilde{d}_T, d_T(I_k, I_l)))$$

where:

P_m represents the set of images that is associated with node n_m

F_a is a decreasing function

w_{att} and w_T represent the weights related to attributes and to time (in our implementation, $w_{att}=3$ and $w_T=1$)

$d_{att}(I_k, I_l)$ is the distance function associated with the characteristic attributes of the two images

\tilde{d}_{att} represents the mean of the distances between images calculated on the initial graph

10 $d_T(I_k, I_l)$ is the temporal distance separating the two images

\tilde{d}_T is equal to T which represents the temporal threshold

K_{att} and K_T are two constants.

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The set of images that is associated with node n_m is also referred to as the class of shots associated with node n_m . This class clusters together the set of images of the classes of merged shots.

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The distance between attributes may be taken as a classwise difference between histograms characterizing each image. The temporal distance is for its part defined as the number of shots separating the two shots to which the images I_k and I_l belong.

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In the implementation, the decreasing function F_a is of the following form:

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$$F_a(K, \tilde{d}, d) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{\frac{K}{\tilde{d}}(d - \tilde{d})}}$$

Values of potential are also calculated for the nodes of the graph. When two nodes n_i and n_j corresponding to key images I_i and I_j belonging respectively to the classes of shot P_i and P_j are merged to create a new node n_k , the images I_i and I_j are integrated into the new class of shots P_k associated with node n_k . The

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number of associated images thus increases in tandem with the mergings. In a general manner, the number of images associated with a new node corresponds to the sum of the images associated with the merged nodes
5 generating the new node.

The potential of a node merged from a first and second node is obtained with the help of the potentials calculated over the set of image pairs formed of an
10 image associated with the first node and of an image associated with the second node. This value is dependent on the distance between attributes d_{att} and on the temporal distance d_T . There are as many potentials calculated as there are image pairs. The value chosen
15 is that which gives the minimum potential.

The potential $V_n(n_m)$ of a node arising from the merging of two existing nodes n_i and n_j is therefore defined by the following function:

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$$V_n(n_m = n_i \cup n_j) = \min_{I_k \in P_i, I_l \in P_j} (w_{att} \cdot F_n(K_{att}, \tilde{d}_{att}, d_{att}(I_k, I_l)) + w_T \cdot F_n(K_T, \tilde{d}_T, d_T(I_k, I_l)))$$

The potential of a merge node is therefore calculated on the basis of the cross distances between the images
25 belonging to each of the nodes that are candidates for the merge.

In the implementation, the increasing function F_n is of the following form:

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$$F_n(K, \tilde{d}, d) = 1 - \frac{1}{1 + e^{\frac{K}{\tilde{d}}(d - \tilde{d})}} = 1 - F_a(K, \tilde{d}, d)$$

On initializing the graph, the potential of the nodes is zero. There is a key image per node. It is in the course of the merging process that this potential takes
35 a strictly positive value.

The factor K used in the functions F_a and F_n is a parameter which influences the curvature of the function. The bigger is K , the more the function tends to 0 or to 1 rapidly when moving away from the mean value \tilde{d} . In terms of potential, the bigger is K , the more the variations in d around the mean value give rise to big variations in the potential.

In the case of the function tied to the distance between attributes, K_{att} may be taken equal to 2. In the case of the function tied to the temporal distance, K_T may be taken equal to 7.

When calculating a potential relating to an image pair (I_i, I_j) , the further apart temporally or according to their attributes are the images processed, the lower is the potential of the edge corresponding to these two images, the greater is the potential of the node corresponding to the merged pair of images.

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The temporal constraint therefore appears in two forms in our algorithm:

- by the existence or not of an edge between two nodes, this existence initially being related to the temporal distance separating two shots
- by the influence of the temporal distance separating two images on the value of the potential associated with the edges or with the nodes.

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The overall energy of the system is equal to the sum of the potentials associated with each edge and with each node.

35 An iterative merging process is implemented to obtain a configuration of the system having the lowest possible overall energy. The aim of each iteration is to decrease the overall energy. The calculation of the minimum energy would require all possible combinations

to be tried. This number possibly being appreciable, as a function of the number of shots, the energy minimization scheme chosen is a suboptimal scheme. It does not guarantee that the solution found does
5 correspond to the configuration minimizing the total energy of the system. However, it has the benefit of being fast while providing an acceptable energy solution.

10 The smaller the distance between two images, the larger the potential of the edge relating to these two images and hence the higher the potential of the edge connecting the corresponding nodes. One seeks to reduce the overall energy of the system, hence to eliminate
15 the edges of largest potential, this amounting to eliminating the potential relating to these edges, the potentials of the edges emanating from the merged nodes being recalculated. This corresponds well to wishing to cluster the closest images, both from the attributes
20 point of view and from the temporal point of view.

The potential of a node obtained after merging the two nodes at the ends of the deleted edge is recalculated. The greater the distances between the images associated
25 with the nodes to be merged, the bigger the potentials of the merged node that relate to the image pairs, the bigger the potential of this node which is the minimum value out of these potentials.

30 In the example of figure 2b, nodes 2 and 4 are merged to give node 7. The key images of nodes 2 and 4 are therefore now associated with node 7. The potential of node 7 is calculated as are the potentials of the new edges departing from this node, thus defining the new
35 configuration.

The iterative energy reduction process implemented is described in figure 3.

The first step referenced 6 verifies whether all the edges of the graph have been tested.

5 If they have, the iterations are terminated and the shots or key images are clustered into classes of shots, created in tandem with the mergings of the nodes of the graph.

10 If they have not, the next step is step 7 which takes into account an untested edge a_k of the graph whose ends are the nodes that will be called n_i and n_j . The edges are for example selected as a function of their energy value in decreasing order of the values of the associated potential. Indeed a deleted edge of high
15 potential gives rise a priori to a big energy drop.

The next step 8 performs a calculation of the energy of the graph by assuming a merging of nodes n_i and n_j . In addition to the potential of the merged node, the
20 potential of the new edges connecting the new node to the set of nodes adjacent to nodes n_i and n_j is taken into account for the calculation of the energy of the new graph. If the energy found is greater than the energy before merging, test performed in step 9, we
25 return to step 6 then to step 7 to process the next edge, should all the edges not have been tested.

Should the energy calculated be less than the energy of the graph before merging, the next step is step 10
30 which validates the merging of nodes n_i and n_j and the new graph which stems therefrom.

The next step 6 verifies whether all the edges have been tested. This deals with the edges not modified by
35 the merging of the nodes but also new edges calculated during this merge. If they have, the final graph is that validated in the previous step 10.

A simplification consists in using a suboptimal stopping criterion making it possible to avoid the exhaustive traversal of the edges. This simplification consists in stopping the minimization as soon as the
5 potential merging of two nodes gives rise to an increase in the energy. This simplification is rendered acceptable by the intelligent selection of the edges in decreasing order of their value of potential.

10 The scheme presented is suboptimal overall on account of the irreversible nature of the merging. The switch to minimization of the optimal energy may be envisaged along with high calculation cost.

15 The choice of the function of energy and potentials that we have just defined allows us to simplify the energy minimization scheme. Specifically, choosing the minimum of the potentials implies that if the potential associated with a node originating from the merging of
20 two nodes is less than the sum of the potentials of these two nodes, then the merging of the two nodes necessarily gives rise to a drop in the potential of the neighbouring edges. A local study of the energy variation is therefore sufficient, while ensuring an
25 overall drop in this energy.

The method described makes it possible to obtain an efficacious merging process despite the calculational limitation. The latter relates to the limited
30 possibilities of initial pairings, the number of edges being limited on initialization. It also relates to the utilization of a reduced window on initialization. However, on account of the merging process, shots that are far apart may be clustered together. The potentials
35 take into account the temporal distances and the distances between attributes. They allow merges if the key images, although distant, greatly resemble one another or else, if, although resembling one another averagely, the key images are temporally very close.